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AUTHOR Martin, Lois A.  
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ABSTRACT

Sex-role stereotyping begins with inaccurate information and false assumptions about the differences between males and females. By engendering patterns of behavior that have failed to keep pace with modern realities, sex-role stereotyping in the instructional program deprives children of the freedom to find their own places in society according to their capabilities. The tendency of the English language to present a male-dominated view of the world, of visual materials to reinforce stereotypes, and of literature, textbooks, and educational programs to ignore women and their contributions is clear. To change this situation, educators must learn to recognize sex-role stereotyping and its consequences and must work to remove, prevent, or offset them. A dozen steps are suggested, including checking for bias in materials, attempting to balance participation in courses and other activities by sex, and modeling unbiased behavior in school practices, including personnel placement. (Author/FGD)

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Lois A. Martin  
Associate Superintendent  
for Instructional Service  
Montgomery County (Maryland)  
Public Schools  
Rockville, Maryland  
(For AASA, 2/18/78)

## SEX ROLE STEREOTYPING IN THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

Last Sunday one of the major Sunday supplements, PARADE magazine, carried an offer billed as "Amazing"-- which it was. For \$1 each, prints were offered of "Why God Made Little Boys" or "Why God Made Little Girls." The illustrations and text show that boys are made to stand "On top of the mountains, to conquer the seas, Explore the plains and climb the trees." Girls, on the other hand, are made "To laugh and dance and sing, To walk in the woods and gather flowers, To commune with nature in quiet hours." Boys obviously have to rise to challenges of the world while girls are destined to be onlookers.

These sentiments continue. Boys are created "full of spirit and fun, To explore and conquer, to romp and run. With dirty faces, banged up chins, With courageous hearts and boyish grins." As a contrast to the energetic, courageous and aggressive male portrayed, the female is described as "With laughing eyes and bouncing curls, With joyful hearts and infectious smiles, Enchanting ways and feminine wiles."

These prints are billed as a wonderful present for "a child you love." They are good examples of sexist social attitudes and, as expressions of warm regard for children, are about as wise as telling them that a magic force will keep them safe if they walk into the path of a truck.

Both boys and girls need to be courageous, energetic, brave, curious, strong, sensitive and joyous. Both need to conquer new worlds and appreciate the virtues of the ones they are in. Schools need to help them do that.

Yet, sex role stereotyping in the instructional program similar to that of the Sunday supplement's special offer gives boys and girls unfair and inaccurate ideas about themselves. It deprives boys and girls of the freedom to find their own places in society according to their capabilities by casting them into an apparently inflexible cultural world. It limits their chances of becoming the men and women they are capable of becoming because it engenders masculine and feminine patterns of behavior that have failed to keep pace with modern realities.

Ironically, throughout our history, Americans have never rigidly followed the expected male and female behavior patterns taught in our schools. Women have worked in factories and mines, done heavy agricultural labor, and operated stores and saloons, as well as rocked cradles, churned butter and stitched clothing. Men have shed tears, cooked and knitted, and nurtured children and flowers as well as dug canals, sold stock and bagged bear. While only men have been fathers, husbands and sons, both men and women have shown a full range of behavior: logical and emotional, courageous and cowardly, risk-taking and cautious, aggressive and passive, weak and strong.

Both men and women share many roles. They have been children and they are citizens. Most are householders and

wage earners, spouses and parents. All are consumers and have intellectual, emotional and physical dimensions. Yet the ideas of the past regarding sex differentiation in these roles continue to be communicated to children. Boys are guided toward vocational education so that they can be wage earners, while girls are enrolled in home economics and taught to be cautious consumers. The boy who reacts emotionally to a poem and the girl who strategizes and fights a winning campaign for student leadership are exceptions to expected behavior.

A good deal is written about futurism in education and training students for life in the twenty-first century. Yet, a look at textbooks, the content of courses, the role models available in schools, and the expectations communicated to boys and girls shows that schools are generally preparing them to live as men and women in the past. And, it's a mythical past at that!

In recent decades much has been written and said in the mass media about the "sexual revolution." Schools have reacted to one aspect of this social upheaval by instituting sex education. Yet, the real sexual revolution is not the change in sexual relationships brought about by the pill. The real sexual revolution is the change in sex roles. Increasing numbers of men and women are earning a living and living their lives in ways that are different from the stereotypes of males and females which permeate our instructional program.

Profound changes in the work force and in the family have taken place in the last twenty-five years. Today over half of the women who are living with husbands and school-age children are wage earners. That is double the proportion

in 1948. One-third of all mothers of preschool children who are living with their husbands are also wage earners. That's three times more than there were in 1948.

One out of every six children under eighteen is living in a single-parent family. Almost one-quarter of this nation's parents who are under twenty-five are raising their children alone. And, of single-parent families living at or below poverty level--that is, with an income of \$4,000 or less a year--86% are headed by women. The remarriage rate for women is not as high as the divorce rate for couples. In addition, there has been a sharp rise in the numbers of unwed mothers. These changes--more mothers of intact families as wage earners and more single-parent families--are occurring most rapidly among younger families, among the poor, and among city dwellers. And, this general trend applies to all social, economic and age groups in the nation. In fact, the greatest change in past decades in labor force participation of women is for women with children and husbands in middle and high income families to become wage earners at a faster rate than low income women did in the early 1960s.

The mothers most likely to work are those whose husbands earn less than \$5,000 a year but, again, at most economic levels, women work to increase family income. However, not all mothers whose families need added income can find jobs. The limiting factor is their education. Women with less than high school educations have the highest rate of non-participation in the labor force.

The federal government has kept pace with these economic

changes by acting through Titles VII and IX to support equal access to jobs and educational opportunities for both sexes. More women are entering a wider range of occupations and more men are taking on greater household responsibilities, including single parenthood.

What can the schools do to help boys and girls develop their own capabilities now and plan realistically for their futures? First, educators must recognize the many forms sex role stereotyping take in our schools and their consequences. Secondly, we must remove, prevent, or offset such stereotyping. Finally, we must begin to reach consensus about the importance of eliminating sex role stereotyping.

Sex role stereotyping begins with inaccurate information and false assumptions about the differences between males and females. Such stereotyping leads both boys and girls to reach conclusions about themselves which are not true and are unfair to them because they reduce their confidence in themselves and limit their life choices.

Let's take an example of how this works. Let's look at how real physical differences between men and women often lead to assumptions about males and females which are not true and which do injustice to both boys and girls.

The average adult male is taller and heavier than the average adult female. That appears to be genetically determined. Accepting that as a fact does not mean that it is correct to assume that all normal males are, in fact, taller than all normal females. Short males and tall females are important segments of our society. They are normal and should be treated

as such and planned for in our educational system. In any coeducational physical education class, some females will be taller than many of the males and some males will be shorter than many of the females, and all will be normal. Napoleon was a little over five feet tall and Mary, Queen of Scots, was six feet. Statistics are meant to describe groups and not individuals. It is tyranny for students to believe that the mid-point in a frequency distribution is normal and everything else is not. It is rank discrimination to class all members of a group with some imaginary average measure for that group. Adolescence would be less traumatic for most boys and girls if our educational program dealt realistically with the wide range of characteristics that are normal for males and females.

Another form of stereotyping is to generalize from one characteristic to another. Because the average adult male is taller than the average adult female, it is not correct to assume that males are more intelligent, physically healthier or more stable emotionally. Neither is it fair to assume the opposite in spite of the fact that twice as many men as women commit suicide, twice as many men as women have ulcers, and men have shorter life expectancies and far more heart attacks than women. Instead of proving male deficiencies, these facts appear to be evidence of a society which places stress unequally on the sexes.

We need instructional programs which deal objectively with the differences between males and females and with the reasons for those differences, some of which appear to be genetic and more of which appear to be culturally determined. We need an

instructional program which points out the range of differences within male and female groups, as well as the many similarities among human beings regardless of sex. Students need accurate information and explanations about human characteristics and behavior, not stereotypes.

Sex differences are often treated in instructional materials in a didactic, moralistic, romanticized, and out-of-date way. When 90% of all American women are wage earners at some time during their lives, it is hardly realistic to talk in textbooks of boys earning money and girls earning extra money, as though males are wage earners but females are supported. Forty percent of the civilian labor force is female. One out of ten women are heads of families, with one out of five minority women heading families. Giving students a version of life which has the mother at home all day and the father as sole wage earner to be pampered at the end of a hard day is not doing them justice. That does not depict life the way it has ever been lived by all Americans. And it is an increasingly false picture today. To suggest to our children that these are the proper or even the ideal roles for men and women is to fill them with a sense of guilt or shame, a sense of false pride, or of false hope. It suggests wrong goals and dangerous emphases. It can lead to prejudice and to weakened families.

Not only does the content of instructional programs and materials present inaccurate or misleading information about males and females and the roles of men and women but our language and our idiom further reinforce stereotypes.

English is a sexist language. "Man" can mean an individual male or all of humanity. "He" can mean an individual male,

anyone in a group, or someone of unknown sex. The problem is that most words are interpreted literally and not generically. It makes the world seem overwhelmingly male.

It has often appeared that there are more important things to do than see that the word "chairman" gets changed to "chairperson." As long as "woman" and "human" contain the word "man," it has been argued, the word "chairman" should stand as clearly applicable to both sexes. This may well be true, but see what sex comes to mind with each of the following terms: Countryman, craftsman, draftsman, flagman, forefather, freeman, journeyman, marksman, middleman, salesman, showman, statesman, upperclassman, shipping boy, yes man, tomboy. Pretty clearly male or female, aren't they?

Terms for the male of the species are usually more complimentary than for the female. Consider brave and squaw, wizard and witch, bachelor and old maid, medic and nurse. Our language not only implies that males predominate numerically but that they are more valued.

Illustrations in books and other visual aids reinforce the sex role stereotypes conveyed by our language. In career education materials, relevant occupational attributes such as clothes and functions are almost invariably attached to such irrelevant ones as sex, age, and race. Hard hats and heavy equipment operation are attached to young males. Aprons and pie baking are attached to elderly females. Problem solvers in mathematics and science are male; assistants are female. Just as male terms and pronouns are most frequent in our language so are males preponderant in visual materials.

An analysis of the Caldecott Award winning children's books since 1950 shows that 65% of the persons illustrated are male and 35% female, with about one-third of the books having illustrations of males only. The proportion of females shown in the Caldecott Award books has declined steadily for each half decade, from a high of 46% in 1951-55, to a low of 22% for 1971-75. One of the most recent Caldecott Award winners, IF ALL THE SEAS WERE ONE SEA, shows the problems we have in English with the literal and generic interpretation of words. It is based upon the verse: "If all the trees were one tree, What a great tree that would be; If all the men were one man, What a great man that would be." The "great man" illustrated includes pictures of 35 males. The term "man" could have been interpreted generically to mean "mankind," but the artist took it literally, as most persons probably would, to mean a male.

Females are outnumbered in literature; virtually invisible in textbooks in mathematics, science and history; and portrayed in stereotypic occupations in career education materials. The content of instructional programs often deals inaccurately with the differences and similarities between males and females, omits or obscures female contributions to our cultural heritage, and idealizes adult roles in the work place and family to fit a society that never really was and certainly never will be.

Boys are counseled toward programs that prepare them to be wage earners, leaders and active athletically. Girls are guided toward programs that prepare them to be consumers, followers, and spectators. Boys are expected to be logical, powerful, assertive and bold while girls are led to view themselves as emotional, weak, cautious and supportive. This is not a

realistic preparation for anybody's future. What can be done about it?

Whether you are a superintendent, a curriculum specialist, a principal or a supervisor, here are a dozen steps you can take to increase educational equity for boys and girls.

First, do something about your language! It shapes your thinking. Get the National Council of Teachers of English "Guidelines to Encourage Non-Sexist Use of Language" and put them into practice. Use the pronoun, "he" only for males. Use neuter generic terms, such as "people," instead of male ones, such as "all men." Drop words that stereotype, such as "old-wives' tale, tomboy, or man-sized job." Read the dictionary definition of "emasculate" and relegate the term to the trash heap of history.

Second, put together guidelines for non-sexist instruction and use them for both course content and instructional materials. The guidelines should include the following pointers:

- Males and females should be dealt with in approximately equal proportions
- Both males and females should be treated as competent and successful workers making significant contributions both in and out of the home
- Both males and females should be treated as possessing the wide range of physical and behavioral characteristics they have

Third, when the only materials available are sexist, see that teachers and students learn how to recognize the slant and remedy the bias. Note the omission of males or females and distorted information about either of the sexes. Note the tendency to overgeneralize from one particular difference between males and females. Discuss the possible reasons for

distortions and omissions and the ways they could be remedied. Examine the inferences which may be made when terms or phrases which have both specific and generic meanings are used, such as "mankind, manned space flight, cavemen or brotherhood."

Fourth, analyze participation in courses and extracurricular activities by sex and remedy imbalances. Involve staff, students and parents. Communicate information about job opportunities or personal uses of the subject or activity and actively recruit students. Provide information to overcome low achievement expectations for one sex, such as for girls in mathematics or interscholastic athletics; or low interest expectations for one sex, such as for boys in home economics or secretarial programs.

Fifth, change course titles and content to make them equally worthwhile for both sexes. Remove course titles such as "Bachelor Living," which imply that an unmarried male is helpless and that the course is for boys only. Revise course content to insure interest and equal treatment for both sexes. There are female cooks but there isn't female cooking. There are male dance band members but there isn't male instrumental music.

Sixth, eliminate sex role stereotyping in school practices. Note unequal treatment of males and females in discipline and in rewards, such as the honor roll, or as classroom helpers or members of the AV equipment crew. Look for unequal treatment of males and females on bulletin boards and in library displays, in announcements and in student newspaper coverage. Look in the classroom for single-sex activities and for communications which set different expectations for boys and girls.

Seventh, see that library collections are balanced.

A good deal has been written on sex role stereotyping in instructional materials and many bibliographies of non-sexist materials exist. Ask librarians to provide inservice for teachers on how to recognize and remedy sex role stereotyping.

Eighth, give career education special attention. Invite community members who are not in sex role stereotyped occupations or activities to meet with students. Provide students with up-to-date information about occupational outlooks. Remember the original definition of "career," which meant the "course of one's life." That includes not only wage earning, but also membership in the family and community. A proper balance in those roles is becoming available to both men and women and should be planned for in educational programs.

Ninth, update your social studies curriculum to include public policy issues and legislation which impinge upon families and the lives of men and women, both as parents and wage earners.

Tenth, work within your school system and professional organizations for substantial curriculum change to prepare students for the future. Examine forecasts about the economy, scientific and technological advances, work opportunities, family life and leisure. If you haven't already read a book that has been around for a number of years, read Alvin Toffler's LEARNING FOR TOMORROW, THE ROLE OF THE FUTURE IN EDUCATION. Also read two new volumes from Research for Better Schools, EDUCATIONAL REFORM FOR A CHANGING SOCIETY and THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION, PERSPECTIVES ON TOMORROW'S SCHOOLING.

Eleventh, since actions speak louder than words, see that

role models are available to help both boys and girls set expectations for themselves. Implement affirmative action in hiring, placement, promotion and practice. Have male secretaries, classroom aides, cafeteria workers and kindergarten teachers. Have female bus drivers, coaches, custodians and administrators. Don't treat male and female staff differently.

Finally, if you're female, quit being reticent about speaking out or acting on sex role stereotyping. It took a Catholic, John F. Kennedy, to challenge successfully the bias against a Catholic in the White House. It took Martin Luther King to lead black Americans to demand their birthright to equal protection under the law. King and Kennedy didn't bring about changes alone. Women won't either. But, we have to take the responsibility for working for those changes because it is we who most clearly see the need.

When sex role stereotyping is eliminated, what difference will it make? It will mean that both boys and girls will have the opportunity to develop their potential for participation in this society as parents, wage earners, citizens, consumers and in a variety of other roles. We now have a curriculum that helps boys make a living and girls to live vicariously. Boys generally get started as wage earners in high school either through training for a job that they will take at the end of high school or planning for an occupation which will require further education. They have minimal opportunities to develop skills or interests that will enable them to participate fully in family life. Girls generally get inadequate vocational education and little preparation for a probable lifetime as a wage learner, but they do have more chance than boys to explore the arts and avocational

interests.

Gilbert Highet in the IMMORTAL PROFESSION wrote that "the chief aim of education is to show you, after you make a livelihood, how to enjoy living." Boys are taught how to make a livelihood but not how to enjoy living. And girls can't expect to enjoy living without being able to make a livelihood.

The elimination of sex role stereotyping will remove economic bias in our instructional programs. Technology has made the wife economy as obsolete in the 20th century as it made the slave economy in the 19th. There hasn't been full-time lifelong work for women as wives and mothers for decades. Even in the past, many wives and mothers who would have liked to give full time to those roles did not have that economic choice. The children of working mothers today should not be led by the schools to consider themselves different and deprived but helped to understand their lives. There is little likelihood that one income will be sufficient to support most two-parent families in the future. To earn wages or not to earn wages will not be the choice of married females. The choice will be which parent, the mother or the father, takes major responsibility for income or for child care and at what times. These are difficult choices. Schools cannot ignore them. Neither can educational programs overlook the fact that some fathers have custody of their children and that some mothers are heads of households.

The elimination of sex role stereotyping is first and foremost a call to improve the lives of women. It is a call to change the expectations women have for themselves, the competencies they develop, and the lifetime choices they make.

This points toward more successful American families. Urie Bronfenbrenner, who has written extensively about families and childrearing practices, has referred to "the place and status of women in American society [as the] . . . most important single factor affecting the nation's children." He notes that a major route to the rehabilitation of children and youth in American society lies in the enhancement of the status and power of women in all walks of life--in the home as well as on the job."

We want the best for our children. That means helping them to understand the changing world and to control their futures in it. It means the elimination of sex role stereotyping with its incapacitating myths about men and women and families who don't exist and never will.